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October 15, 1999

The Honorable Ted Stevens
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
S-206, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable C.W. Young
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
H-218, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth House Office
Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Stevens, Senator Byrd, Chairman Young, and Representative Obey:

As you begin negotiations on the fiscal 2000 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor-HHS) appropriations bill, the nation's Governors strongly urge to maintain your commitment to key state programs. We are adamantly opposed, as stated in the attached resolution the Governors adopted in August, to cutting funding for other vital health and human services programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Title XX/Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), child support, and education and training programs which would adversely affect millions of Americans -- with the greatest impact on children and the elderly in the greatest need.

We are especially concerned about the status of SSBG in the current versions of the Labor-HHS bills. Over the past few years, SSBG has taken more than its share of cuts in federal funding. As part of the 1996 welfare reform deal, Congress made a commitment to Governors that SSBG would be level funded at \$2.38 billion each year. In fact, Governors reluctantly accepted a 15 percent cut in SSBG funds at that time in exchange for the commitment for stable funding in the future. However, repeated cuts in SSBG have been enacted regardless of that commitment. In fiscal 1998, funding for SSBG was reduced to \$2.299 billion. It was again reduced in fiscal 1999 to \$1.909 billion. Further reductions in funding for SSBG will result in cuts to vital human services for our most vulnerable citizens.

In addition, Governors strongly support the provision from the 1996 welfare reform law that allows states to transfer up to 10 percent of their TANF block grant into SSBG. Both the House and Senate versions of the fiscal 2000 Labor-HHS bill reduce the amount states can transfer from TANF to SSBG. This restriction of flexibility is in essence an additional cut in funding for SSBG. The

nation's Governors strongly urge you to restore the transferability provision to the full 10 percent.

SSBG provides services to needy populations, including low-income children and families, the elderly, and the disabled. While SSBG does have a strong connection with welfare reform efforts in states by providing valuable resources for child care and transportation, it also provides services to many individuals who are not considered welfare recipients. For example, in many states, SSBG funding is used to provide foster care assistance, meals on wheels for the elderly, and independent living services for the disabled -- programs which are not allowable uses of welfare funds such as TANF.

The Governors are not seeking increased federal funding; we are simply requesting that you fulfill your commitments and reject cuts in programs such as SSBG that would jeopardize our strong state-federal partnership.

Sincerely,

Governor Michael O. Leavitt
Chairman

Governor Parris N. Glendening
Vice Chairman

(Signatures on File)

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